

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

SOUTHCENTRAL REGIONAL OFFICE

Contaminated Site Programs

3601 C Street, Suite 1334

Anchorage, AK 99503

To	<i>Source DeVries</i>	From	<i>John H. Hansen</i>
Company	<i>USFW</i>	Sender	
Dept.	<i>Env.</i>	Phone #	<i>(907) 563-6529</i>
Fax #	<i>271-2786</i>	Fax #	<i>(907) 273-4331</i>

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SUBJECT: <i>WW II Construction Report</i>
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COMMENTS: <i>I just found a good report on construction of WW II facilities in AK. Enclosed is a section of the report that has info. on Amchitka. Do you have a copy of this report? If not you may want to get me from us or the Corps of Engineers.</i>
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271-2786

**NARRATIVE REPORT  
OF  
ALASKA CONSTRUCTION  
1941---1944**

**WRITTEN BY COL JAMES D. BUSH, Jr.,**

**. U.S. ARMY ENGINEER DISTRICT ALASKA  
ALASKA ANCHORAGE, 1934**

ACE 432286

**AMCHITKA**

The purpose of the Amchitka project was to provide a main advance base for long-range bombing missions against the Japanese Archipelago and a base for offensive action against Attu and Kiska. The site was within 15 minutes fighter and bomber range of Japanese held Kiska. Amchitka afforded an excellent location for AWS installations from which any Japanese moves to or from their main Kiska installations could be detected. Amchitka Island, in the Western Aleutians, is long and narrow, being roughly 40 miles long and averaging 3 to 4 miles in width. It is located at approximately 179° east longitude, 69 miles east of Kiska Island. Best harbor facilities exist in Constantine Harbor, on the east end of the Island. The terrain is also relatively flat at this location, affording excellent airfield locations.

The original program at Amchitka was authorized by letter dated 7 October 1942 from the Alaska Defense Command to the Western Defense Command.

The original construction program provided for (in order of priority): a 150' by 4,000' fighter strip, 2 lighterage docks, access roads, ships dock, bomber runway of unspecified dimensions, housing for a garrison of 8,000 officers and men, and necessary utilities. Constant patrol activities by float-type Japanese aircraft made it imperative that a fighter strip be constructed in the least possible time. Lighterage docks were of utmost importance to facilitate landing of additional personnel and equipment.

After preliminary Engineer reconnaissance of 17 December 1942, initial landings were made at Constantine Harbor on 15 January 1943. Two days later, construction was initiated on a fighter strip, a lighterage dock and access roads.

Subsequent necessities and authorization increased the construction program to include the following, in addition to original construction: a bomber runway 200' by 10,000' with a cross runway 200' by 5,000', both with steel mat surfacing, Kodiak "T" hangars, 1,500,000 gallon aviation gasoline storage, 2,800' rock jetty and wharf, Ordnance overhaul facilities, and two 500 bed hospital units.

Construction of the main bomber runway was initiated in early March. The location is on a high, flat area, above Constantine Harbor. Depth of muskeg varied from 2' to 8', and a large number of small, dispersed lakes occupied the area. All muskeg was stripped off to put in a substantial sub-grade. The main fill was with sand, varying in depth from 2' to 12'. A runway 200' by 5,000' with a steel mat surface was completed in 2 months. This runway was regularly used by all types of heavy bombers in offensive operations until the Kiska invasion. The main bomber runway was extended to 10,000' during October 1943, and it is to be completed with a steel mat by 15 November 1943.

Construction personnel at Amchitka included one combat Engineer Regiment, one Aviation Engineer battalion, and one Engineer (GS) battalion. The 151st Engineer regiment (C) constructed the buildings, the 813th Engineer battalion (Avn)(Sep) constructed the airfield, and the 177th Engineer regiment (GS) the Air Corps gasoline systems. After diversion of a large part of the heavy equipment

after the initial construction period the project still has a large amount of heavy equipment, including 18 D-8 tractors, 48 yard Euclid trucks and 10 power shovels of various capacities up to two cubic yards. With more heavy equipment than other Westward projects, Anchitka reached its construction peak during October. A notable high was attained on the bomber runway extension -- during 24-hour periods with favorable weather, as much as 30,000 cubic yards of sand fill was hauled to the runway site, while the daily average has been about 20,000 cubic yards. Subsequent authorizations by November increased the garrison to a strength of 14,500 officers and men.

One of the problems of construction was the fighter strip, located in a tidal marsh running for about 4,000' inland from the head of Constantine Harbor. Profiting from previous experience at Adak, drainage ditches were dug and a tide gate was constructed. However, the problem of drainage proved much simpler than at Adak, and the area was satisfactorily drained, leaving a substantial sand base, without need of an elaborate dewatering pump system. In addition to the usual inclement weather, enemy aircraft offered other impediments to construction, making six separate raids, which resulted in two large bomb craters in the runway area, and several casualties. On 16 February 1943, the first pursuit planes landed on the new strip and from that time there was only light enemy aerial activity.

One of the outstanding construction features of this project was the construction of a 2,800' jetty from the north shore at the mouth of Constantine Harbor. Work was done by the West Construction

Company, using rock quarried from Kirilof Point, a distance of approximately one quarter of a mile from the jetty location. Construction was initiated in April during particularly heavy weather. On numerous occasions washouts occurred. The jetty was completed however, by the end of July, and Kirilof wharf construction was underway on the leeward side of the jetty. The wharf is 70' by 800' -- one of the largest wharfs at any Alaska project, and the largest in the Aleutian "Chain". Neither the wharf nor the jetty has proved entirely satisfactory. In recent heavy Bering Sea storms, 300' of the jetty and fill behind the wharf were washed away. The jetty was repaired and proposed construction of pile bent approaches to the wharf was expected to put both features back in operation.

Colonel Fisher S. Blinn was the Resident Engineer at Anchitka, assisted by Major Frank Brock. Colonel Louis H. Foote commanded the 813th Engineer battalion (Avn)(Sep) troops constructing the airfield, Colonel Fisher S. Blinn, the 151st Engineer regiment (C), and Lt. Colonel John J. Sullivan, CE, the 177th Engineer regiment (GS).

Anticipated completion of the Anchitka project was set for 1 June 1944. The estimated cost is \$20,822,280.

